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CHARGES

AGAINST THE

PRESIDENT AND COUNCILS

OF

The Royal Society.

BY

SIR JAMES SOUTH,

FELLOW OF THE SOCIETY, AND LATE MEMBER OF ITS COUNCIL.

SECOND EDITION.

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ADVERTISEMENT.

IT is well known to the scientific Public, that I stand pledged to present to them a work, entitled, “ *On the Conduct of the Royal Society, as connected with the Decline of Science in England; together with Arguments, proving, that before the Society can regain Confidence at Home, or Respect from Abroad, a Reform of its Conduct, and a Remodelling of its Charter, are indispensable.*”

When this promise was made, I entertained the most sanguine hopes, that the book in question, would have made its appearance previously to the approaching Anniversary of the Society; so that any charges it should contain, or any hints it should convey, might be refuted, or discussed, by the Fellows then assembled.

The unceasing attention, however, which the erection of my large Equatorial has demanded, will, I find, effectually preclude the completion of my wish. Aware of this, I have thought it advisable to publish forthwith, a brief outline of those proceedings of the President and Councils, which will furnish the foundation of my future volume.

JAMES SOUTH.

OBSERVATORY, KENSINGTON,
Nov. 11, 1830.



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PREFACE TO THE SECOND EDITION.

DESIROUS that the Charges contained in the former Edition should be rendered accessible to such present and future Fellows of the Society as might wish to peruse them, I did myself the honor of transmitting a copy of the work, on Thursday last, the 18th inst., through the Clerk, in order that it might be publicly announced, and deposited in the Society's library.

Although, however, a notice of this present was inserted by the Clerk, with every regularity, in the list of presents for the Secretary's reading—the notice, on a consultation between Mr. Davies Gilbert, the President, and Dr. Roget, the Secretary, was cancelled—the present was not announced,—and the Book in question, which had, with many others, been honoured by a place on the table of the Society's meeting-room,—was, by order of the latter, taken from the room by the Clerk.

Whether these personages—the one requited by *honor* for holding the office of President, the other *paid* out of the Society's funds for

discharging the duties of Secretary—are to be the judges of what the Fellows ought to give,—or what the Society ought to receive for its library,—is, for the body at large,—and not for *me*, to determine.

It is due to Captain Kater to state thus publicly, that on being informed of the omission by one of the Fellows, he quitted his seat, and conveyed his disapprobation of such a proceeding, by a verbal communication to the President.

One or two additional Charges will be found in *this*, which were not included in the *first* edition. I have not thought it worth while to polish the language in which the former were conveyed; they carry with them evidence of haste in point of composition, though they are derived from documents collected with considerable care—nor will I alter or soften down the style—to suit the taste of the fastidious; for if the Charges themselves be founded in truth, words, much stronger than I have used might be considered lenient.

J. SOUTH.

OBSERVATORY, KENSINGTON,
Nov. 25, 1830.

Charges.

1. For having kept, during many months, from inspection by the Fellows, the minutes of the proceedings of the Council; and from members of Committees, the minutes of Subcommittees, appointed by themselves; notwithstanding the Secretariat department costs the Fellows, upwards of 580*l.* a year.*

2. For omitting to enter on the minutes, letters of Fellows, which conveyed sentiments not pleasing to themselves; or calculated to expose to the Society, the lamentable state of its affairs.

3. For having altered or garbled minutes of

* It is well known that the Council have, within these few weeks, held several meetings—it is also notorious that some *extraordinary* proceedings have marked their deliberations;—yet the minutes of no one of these Councils are entered in the journals, a fault *not* attributable to the Clerk. —
Saturday, November 20.

the proceedings of the Council, *the originals* being less suited, to the purposes of delusion.

4. As Visitors of the Royal Observatory, having saddled the country, year after year, with considerable expense, in order that astronomical observations might be pursued uninterruptedly, by additional assistants, through the night,—for permitting the continuous observations to terminate, and the Observatory to be put to sleep, generally at, or even before midnight.

5. Having received intimation that His Royal Highness the Duke of Sussex, was anxious to have a seat in the Council,—for having uncere-
moniously pronounced his wish *an improper one*; fearing, perhaps, lest the manly sagacity of His Royal Highness, might penetrate some of their mysteries.*

6. For having promoted to honour—(I beg

* By a printed notice which I received yesterday, it seems that the present Council, to imitate the example of a preceding one, are resolved to shut the doors of the council-room against the Brother of their Patron—thereby expressing their conviction, that ROYALTY and *love for science*, are incompatible. When Buonaparte on the field of battle signed his despatch, “*Général en chef de l’Armée d’Egypte*,” he forgot not to affix to it, “*Membre de l’Institut*.” When Napoleon (Old England alone excepted) was “*Empereur de l’Europe*,” he thought the title wanted *lustre*, and added to it, “*Protecteur de l’Institut de France*.”

Whilst holding out to his soldiers, composing “*La Grande Armée d’Angleterre*,” on the downs of Boulogne, the *deliciæ*

pardon, to seats which formerly were honourable)—individuals, whose observations had, by their marvellous coincidence, created astonishment amongst scientific men, both at home and abroad.*

7. For having thrown away the public money, by publishing astronomical observations, from manuscripts which *they* considered original, but which the most superficial examination of the *well informed*, immediately detected to be mutilated copies.

8. For having endeavoured to get sent from the country to its antipodes, on an arduous

of anticipated spoils, he promised to the Savans of France, as a reward for the services they had rendered to mankind, “le grand Telescope de Herschel.”

George the Third was a *friend* of science ; His purse paid for the Observations of the Transit of Venus ; His munificence defrayed the expenses of the Schehallian experiments. And, but for Him, England could not have considered Herschel as her own ; nor could the Royal Society, with *broken* character, and *breaking* heart—in the agonies of approaching dissolution—have prayed with death-bed penitence—for the PRESIDENCY OF HIS SON ; *Haud ulli Veterum, nec Patri suo, virtute, industriâ, aut scientiâ secundi.*

* The existence of Captain Sabine’s Pendulum experiments, *in a printed form*, which Mr. Babbage has lately criticised, was first made known to me during my residence in Paris, in 1825, by M. Biot ; and were announced by him to Captain Beaufort, (who was just arrived from England) in the presence of perhaps twenty foreign Savans, in these memorable words, almost converted into a national taunt—“I tell you, Monsieur Beaufort, these observations are not human.”

public scientific appointment, under accusations the most serious, an individual, whose self-condemnation is before the public.

9. For having defrauded Sir Thomas Brisbane of his scientific rights; for having published the observations made at his own expense, and in his own observatory, without having even consulted him, on the matter; and for having omitted all mention of those facts, in the work alluded to. Having acknowledged before the Society and its Visitors, at one of its weekly meetings, that the above accusations were just,—for having entered on the journals no minute that such charges had been made by one of the Fellows; and for allowing the predatory volume of the Philosophical Transactions to remain, till the present day, in its original state, notwithstanding six months ago, the President “entirely acquiesced” in the suggestion of the complaining Fellow, “that the Title-page of the volume should be cancelled, and that its Preface should be re-written.”

10. Having procured Captain Kater to make experiments on “Weights and Measures,” which have led to an enormous public expense,—for allowing *those*, whom it was their *duty* to have informed of their failure, to remain in the undisturbed enjoyment of their ideas, “that

the object contemplated by Parliament, had been most happily attained ;” whereas it is known, not only to the President, but it is notorious throughout Europe, aye, and in America too, that Captain Kater’s experiments *must* be repeated, ere we can pretend to accurate estimations, either of MEASURE, or of WEIGHT.

11. For refusing to discuss the merits of a single paragraph of a “ Report of a Committee” unanimously appointed by the Council of the preceding year, which had for its object, “to consider the best means of limiting the Members admitted into the Society,” &c. ; because the suggestions contained in the “ Report,” if adopted, would certainly have displaced themselves and their President.

12. For having converted into an eating and drinking party, the visitation of the Royal Observatory ; so that His Majesty has been graciously pleased, to transfer the moiety of an honour, enjoyed by the Royal Society *nearly a century and a half!*—to another Society.

13. For having intended to give the Copley Medal last year, for a paper presented to the Society, subsequent to the period when, by established custom, such competition was precluded ; and moreover, that such intention was expressed, before the paper had been read to

the Society; circumstances which becoming known to the author of the paper alluded to, caused him to hint to some Members of the Council, that their Medal would not be acceptable; thus placing the Society in the *disgraceful* predicament of having its Copley Medal refused by the individual, for whom it had been unwarrantably designed.

14. For having excluded other scientific men, whose labours had been completed within the customary date, from all competition for the Copley Medal, because they were too indolent, or too ignorant, to adjudge it.

15. For having voted one of the King's Medals last year, for intricate anatomical investigations and disputed physiological deductions, on the evidence of a single member of the Council—the rest making no pretensions to anatomical knowledge.* And for having adjudged

* The distinguished Author of the papers alluded to, is too highly respected for his indefatigable industry,—for his disinterested devotion to his favourite pursuit,—and for the success with which he imparts his knowledge to others,—to need that his merits should be acknowledged by any act of the Royal Society. He must, however, highly prize the adjudication, when he reads the names and smiles at the qualifications of those who pronounced it. To save him the trouble of consulting the minutes, the following are the names of the adjudging Councillors:—“Mr. Baily, Mr. Brown, Mr. Chantrey, Dr. Fitton, Captain Kater, Dr. Roget, Captain Sabine, and Mr. Warburton.”

the other for a subject acknowledged by the President “to be very little known in this country,” and of which no one member of the Council, knew *anything*, except by report.

16. For having shown the most marked disrespect to our deceased Sovereign, by presenting to those persons to whom such prizes were awarded, empty boxes in lieu of Royal Medals.

17. For having wronged Lieut. Drummond, and other philosophers, both at home and abroad, by not investigating their several claims to the Rumford Medal, during last season.

18. For having allowed the Nautical Almanac to continue a disgrace to the country, so that the Government has been compelled to confide its improvement, to another Society.

19. For having violated the freedom of election, by permitting an officer of the Council, to distribute letters amongst the Fellows, to influence their Votes.

20. Many hundreds* of the Society’s funds having been converted into “White Bait, Rose Water, and Sauterne,”—for having urged the

* Some of my friends having communicated to me their fears that this charge could not be substantiated, the following abstract, taken from my copies of the Society’s journals, will probably quiet their apprehensions :

propriety of spending hundreds more, because a Vice President conceived that “the business of

	£.	s.
Nov. 14, 1822. Thomas Ottey, for Anniversary Dinner . . .	48	0
20, 1823. Thomas Ottey, for Anniversary Dinner . . .	30	11
18, 1824. Thomas Ottey, for Anniversary Dinner . . .	33	1
———— Account of Expenses for Visitation	10	19
16, 1825. Mr. Samuel Lovegrove, for Visitation Dinner	10	12
23, 1826. Mr. Ottey, for Anniversary Dinner	33	10
15, 1827. Mr. Ottey, for Anniversary Dinner	40	10
———— Mr. Lovegrove, for Visitation Dinner	28	17

Thus we have 236*l.* of the Society’s money devoted to the *scientific* purposes of *eating* and *drinking*, during an interval of six years!!!—data referring to a more distant period, amongst my own papers, I cannot find; as, however, these above given, are sufficient for my *present* purpose, I have not thought it worth a walk to town, to search for more. *When* the practice originated my memory does not enable me to state; but in the absence of official proofs, I will trust it so far, as to assert, that it may be traced to the *jolly days* of JOSEPH BANKS.

Such were the circumstances which induced me, in the Council of November 26, 1827, to make the following motion: “*That the Tavern Bills incurred at the Anniversary and Visitation Dinners be discharged at the expense of those who partake of them, excepting, however, the share appertaining to the Assistant-Secretary, which it is still recommended should be paid out of the funds of the Society;*” which, after a sharp debate of an hour, or an hour and a half, was carried by a majority of ONE!!!

Notwithstanding this resolution, it is said, that its provisions are not strictly enforced, and that Bills against the Society, for Tavern-feasting, have been *lately* presented! If it be so, I hope and trust that Captain Kater will not pay them. As Treasurer, he has rendered *valuable* services to the Society; let him resent this infringement of an established law, by the non-payment of the consequences of it, and the Society will support his refusal with their *votes*, and requite his firmness with their *gratitude*.

the Society was transacted at the dinner table;" whilst another officer maintained, that if the system was broken in upon, "the Assistant Secretary would lose his per centage on the Tavern Bills." *

21. For having solicited tenders from different printers, as to the terms on which they would severally print the Society's Transactions, and for accepting that of an individual, materially higher than others, because "they did not like any thing cheap."

22. For having shut out from a seat in the Council the "most profound mathematician of Great Britain," to make room for an amiable relative of the President's, who presumes not, to the humblest scientific acquirements.†

23. For having voted that the President and *two* Fellows of the Society, were numerically the same, as the President and *three* Fellows; in order to keep a seat in the Board of Longi-

* Justice to the Assistant Secretary requires me to state my conviction, that the imputation is unfounded. Mr. Hudson is, I believe, incapable of a dishonourable act.

† In *England* there may perhaps be some doubt, to whom this refers. The sentiment, however comes to us on too high authority, for its accuracy to be disputed.—Monsieur La Place pronounced Mr. Ivory (the rejected of the Royal Society Council) "*sans doute le meilleur Géomètre d'Angleterre, et un des plus forts de l'Europe.*"

tude, ready for Mr. Davies Gilbert to slip into, whenever he should be driven from the President's chair.

24. For having permitted Mr. Davies Gilbert, in their presence, openly to bargain for his return to the post of Treasurer of the Society, on his quitting the Presidency; whereby the till then highly honourable office of Treasurer, was publicly refused, both by Captain Beaufort, and Dr. Fitton.*

25. For having, in their publication of the Greenwich Observations, shewn such marked inattention to the trust reposed in them by Royalty, that His Majesty, by and with the advice of his Privy Council, has, for the publication of future volumes, extended his confidence to another Society.

26. Informed of the rapid strides which Astronomy was making on the Continent,—for having refused to aid its progress in England, “lest by so doing, they should lose their 1000*l.* a year of the public money, allowed them by Act of Parliament, as Members of the Board of

* Captain Kater's good nature, on the solicitation of Dr. Wollaston and Dr. Young, induced him to accept the place, in this, the Council's dilemma: for the last two years, however, he has held it *unconditionally*.

Longitude ;” a sum, they spent one year in rewarding pendulum experiments, which Mr. Babbage has lately discussed *for* them—a sum, which they are reported to have disposed of another year, in buying tables constructed by one of themselves; and which even their own advertising cannot persuade seamen to purchase; but—a sum, out of which they could not spare any year, one single farthing, for rewarding the labours of Captain Thomson, whose tables, and whose rule, for facilitating the reduction of nautical observations, are received into the merchant service of Great Britain—are employed in the French navy—and have proved a greater benefit to seamen, than did the united services of *all* the Members of the Board of Longitude, from the period of its *unfortunate* formation, until the day of its *meritorious* dissolution.

27. For having obtained, through their Treasurer, Captain Kater, the return of a letter, sent officially to an individual by their Secretary, and for having substituted another in its stead.

28. Thousands of the public money, having been spent by them, on the manufacture of glass for optical purposes—for having gone on floundering in their folly, at the public expense, “because, for their own *characters*, it was too late to retract.”

29. For having, in the midst of their glass-making dilemma, refused the proffered assistance of an English optician, second in merit *only*, to the ever-to-be-lamented Fraunhofer.

30. For having, after six years and a half of experimenting at the public expense, “on the manufacture of glass for optical purposes,” caused it to be more difficult, to obtain good flint-glass in Great Britain, than it has ever been, since the memory of man; whereby they have lost for us, the honour of being, as formerly, the opticians of the world, and have deprived the revenue, of a profitable branch of income.

31. Having invited foreign glass-makers to transmit their specimens of flint-glass—for having given official opinions of them, at *variance* with *fact*; and thereby reducing, as far as in them lay, the talents of *foreign* glass-makers to a level with *their own*.

32. Having, under an explicit pledge, persuaded an individual to withdraw a motion, which the Council deemed it inexpedient to oppose,—for refusing, when called upon, to fulfil it.

33. For having buried the Society’s *books* in cellars, pronounced by the geologists, too damp even for the reception of *flints*.

34. For having, on the 19th of November last, paid away 2600*l.* of the Society’s money

without the slightest investigation,—in defiance of a standing law of the Society,—with which they were intimately acquainted,—of which they were reminded by one of the Council,—but which they persisted in disregarding, because “it had not been acted upon for some time.”

35. For having *irregularly* entered on the minutes of the Council, of the 10th of June last, against one of the *best* friends of science and of the Society, an empty threat, which they had neither the manliness to pursue,—nor the candour to retract.*

* The following note is from “*The Times*” of July 8 :

“At a meeting of the Council of the Royal Society, held in the Society’s apartments, on the 10th of June last, the Secretary has recorded the following speeches :

“ ‘ Captain Kater stated, that he wished to take the liberty of proposing a question upon a subject in which he conceived the dignity and well-being of the Society were concerned. As the Charter invests the Council with the sole government of the Royal Society, and the exclusive management of all its concerns, he conceived that one of the first duties of the Council was that of preserving the statutes inviolate, and of noticing any infringement of them. He therefore requested to be informed whether any and what steps were intended to be taken respecting a publication by Mr. Babbage, entitled, *On the Decline of Science in England*.

“ ‘ The President thereupon observed, that deeply as he regretted the injurious tendency of Mr. Babbage’s publication, and disapproved of the uncandid spirit which pervaded it, and notwithstanding the violation of the statutes, which had in strictness subjected its author to the penalty of ejection from the Society; he was yet unwilling, in consideration

36. For having an average income of 2000*l.* a year, which they spend in mace gilding, picture cleaning, and other frivolities; whilst they purchase not a single book to add to their imperfect library,*—apply to the Government continually for money,—and contribute not a shilling out of their own funds,—for aiding a SINGLE SCIENTIFIC INVESTIGATION.

of the past services which Mr. Babbage has rendered to science, to proceed to this extremity; but thought it would be more consistent with the dignity of the Society to wave all further notice of this matter.

““ Captain Kater replied, that no one could have a higher respect for Mr. Babbage’s scientific attainments than he had, and that he had been in habits of the most friendly intercourse with him for many years. Nothing but a sense of duty had prompted his bringing this matter before the Council; he felt it, however, also to be his duty to *bow with implicit deference* to the opinion of the President, and would therefore refrain from offering any further remark upon the subject.’”

Present on this memorable occasion:

“ Davies Gilbert, Esq., President, in the chair; Mr. Charles Bell, Mr. Robert Brown, Mr. Frederick Daniell, Mr. Henry Ellis, Captain Kater, Captain Sir John Franklin, Dr. Philip, Mr. Pond, Mr. George Rennie, Dr. Roget, and Mr. Warburton.”

Really, on finding that some of the above persons joined in such a proceeding, one is led to suspect that the atmosphere of the Royal Society Council-room must contain some pestiferous principle.

* It is a fact which will be scarcely credited in other countries, that the library of the Royal Society, does not contain a single number of the *Annales de Chimie*!!!

37. For gross inattention to the Society's pecuniary concerns, whereby a sum of 500*l.* was owing to it by various Fellows; whilst the then Treasurer assured us, that all the outstanding debts of that description, would be more than covered by 30*l.*; and, who on that ground, resisted a motion, in effect, requesting him to act up to the duty prescribed to him by Article VI. chap. 8, of the printed Statutes.

38. For having lost of the Society's land several acres, none of them knowing, how—why—or when. And for having let other property, on terms so disproportionate to its value, that the Royal Society's *care* of their estate, became a topic of village conversation.

39. For having lavished of the public money, during the last summer, some four or five hundred pounds, in determining the differences of level, step by step, between the Thames at Sheerness, and the Thames at Somerset House;—information which was publicly offered them, some two or three years ago, by a practical engineer of acknowledged talent, for the trifling sum of 30*l.*, but which at that time was deemed beyond its value.*

* The precise amount of expense I have not *yet* been able to ascertain; there is, however, reason to believe, that the sum here given, is not exaggerated. It is also reported that

CONCLUSION.

Such are *some* of my charges against the *Managers* of the Royal Society. Personal animosity towards any of them, I disclaim. For the President, except in the chair of the Society, I entertain the highest esteem; and with pain have I seen him, from the first day of his Presidency, to the very moment I write this, by conduct the most vacillating,—and by good nature the most reprehensible,—involve *himself* in *trouble*, and the *Society* in *disgrace*. Amongst the Members of the present and of the past Councils, are, and have been, many individuals, to whom I have long been tied, by the bands of friendship, and with pain have I known, some of them, sit *mute* in the Council, whilst *opposite* conduct would have *saved* the Society, from those *painful* exposures, which have recently become *indispensable*, for its restoration.

The facts asserted in the preceding pages are indeed appalling: whether the Treasurer, on reading them, may, in the Council, “*request to*

the Society’s levellings of the public money, are not to terminate at Somerset House, but that they are to be proceeded in, higher up the river; if so, it is to be hoped the Government will keep a sharp look out, lest the Society level *them* also.

be informed, whether any and what steps are intended to be taken respecting the publication of them?" whether, "*notwithstanding the violation of the statutes which will in strictness subject me to the penalty of ejection, the President may be yet unwilling to proceed to this extremity ;*" or, whether the Treasurer, in this, as in a former instance, "*may feel it his duty to bow with implicit deference to the opinion of the President,*" be that opinion what it may, is indeed to me a matter of *indifference* : for where ADMISION IS NO HONOUR, EXPULSION CAN BE NO DISGRACE.

